



NAVIGATING TO A NEW NORMAL

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Chapter 9

# Renewing Faith

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**IGNITE**360

March 2021

## IN THE PAST YEAR,

the distancing required by the pandemic has taken a toll by separating people physically. It has also created a spiritual distance.

Some people are losing their connection to their faith while others have begun to reimagine or develop a stronger faith built on self-driven activities.

When we think about the impact of the pandemic, the *Navigating to a New Normal* tracker has found that limited social gatherings with friends and family to be the most difficult life adjustment (31%) for American adults, followed by limited physical contact with people (29%). Also, in the top 10 difficult life adjustments are keeping in touch with friends (20%) and family (20%). These difficulties are all about what's been reduced due to the pandemic – social interaction and connection.

For many Americans, a critical part of their connections are found in the community of their local religious organization. **Only 17% of Americans reported visiting a place of worship in the past week** (3<sup>rd</sup> week of March 2021) **down from 30% two weeks earlier**. Whether it's a church, temple, mosque or other place of worship or gathering, the connections that form in this community go beyond spiritual, it extends to the social as well. People draw emotional strength from these connections as well as spiritual nurturing. The distancing from community this past year has caused a trend toward inward reflection which is **leading people to reimagine what they want from their lives when the pandemic is over and life resumes 'as normal'**.

The pandemic has also impacted people's sense of faith and how they practice. In some cases, the absence of a guiding organization has left them adrift in their spiritual practice.

How has the pandemic affected people's faith and the ways they practice their religion or spirituality? In this Chapter 9 of *Navigating to a New Normal*, we explore how people's connection to their faith has evolved over this past year, looking at conversations from early April 2020 compared to March 2021.



***(My faith) it's so low and now, just talking about it going, 'Okay, we gotta do something about this.' It's almost like you're giving me a kick in the pants.***

– Jennifer, rural SC  
41, mom of 3

# ZOOMING IN, ZONING OUT



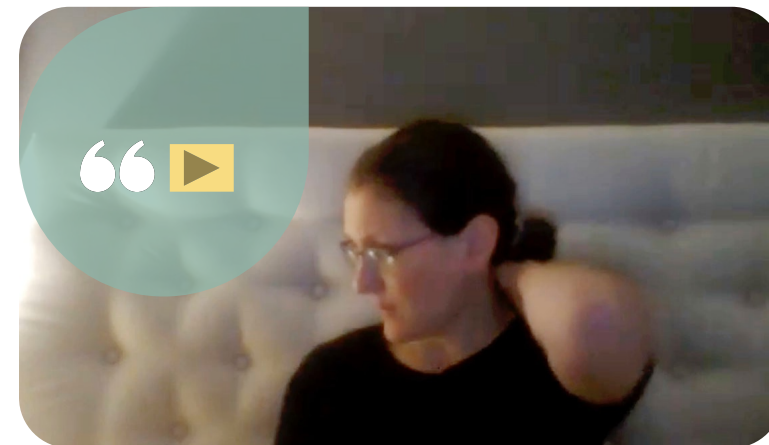
While TV-based ministries are nothing new, many local houses of worship figured out how to safely stream services and study classes to their congregations.

*“No matter what, there is a degree of- just seeing somebody like this, there's just a degree of disconnect there. No matter how hard that you try, you can't fully replace it,”*

Jenika told us while comparing Bible Study in person to the Zoom substitute her Kingdom Hall has instituted. *“It's a great something that you're still thankful for. It happens. It's not the same thing.”*

Similarly, Jennifer in rural South Carolina tried watching Catholic mass on TV at the start of the pandemic but *“felt disconnected”* from what was going on. Her family's practice has tapered off which has eroded their connection to their faith. Her kids currently read from the Bible but there isn't an organized Bible study to further engage them in what they are reading. *“It's like, ‘Can you just go on with your life without it [the church]?’ And you start thinking about that. And then the other part of you is like, ‘No!’”*

Francia in Minneapolis will watch services on TV in her basement, turning the music up and will, at times, cry along with the music.



Broadcast services are pale substitutes for the real, in-person experience. While we seem comfortable working remotely, we don't want to pray remotely, as Jennifer explains:

*“When I go to mass, you can feel it in your heart and you can feel it in your soul that it's just- it sings. And I swear that God always does this. And He will put it in a hymn that is in the bulletin... - one of those songs, one of those hymns will have meaning to me. And I will be in tears, and it's just like, ‘I am so sorry. I guess, I was bad. Yes. I should have been here.’ And I can feel it in my heart, in my soul, like to the depth of your soul, you can feel that. And you can feel that yearning for this.”*

# MY FAITH DEPENDS ON ME

Losing access to places of worship have prompted some people to develop their own practice of prayer and study on their own. In some cases, they have actually found a stronger connection to God and their faith.

Francia, married mom of a teenager, lives in Minneapolis. She says she ***“has become more consistent with her time with God,”*** making time each morning for five minutes of prayer, reading the Bible and reflection. She tells us that it gives her ***“everything that I need for my day.”*** She has also realized that her faith depends on her, not on what others give her. She used to participate regularly in a women’s group for Bible study but now that she’s on her own, she prefers this solo approach.

Recently, Francia was torn about letting her daughter go to public school instead of parochial school. Through her own prayer, she tells us, she came to realize that, like Moses, her daughter has her own destination in life that no one can change. She recognized that her role as a mother is to put her daughter in a basket, like Moses, and send her on her journey down “the river of life.” She sees this realization as a sign of her own growth because she didn’t have to call on friends to figure this out. She has learned how to pray and listen to the answer.



Similarly, Larry, a 67-year old retiree in San Francisco says ***“I still have the same faith or much stronger, praying more than I did before.”*** He has shifted his practice to praying in a quiet room at home. He’s found that the content of his prayers has also shifted. ***“Before, I prayed out of respect to higher powers but not for anything specific. Now, it’s for health and covid relief and the vaccine, that the economy wouldn’t tank. I have something concrete that I pray for. It’s getting me through.”***

***“Faith is like concrete. It’s the foundation that keeps you going when you want to give up,”*** added Gail, 62 in rural North Carolina. She misses church-going and the community side of worshipping with other people but remains pragmatic about the risk.

# FEELING A LITTLE LOST

While some have taken on their practice of faith as a private matter, the outside connections are still desired to fully experience a faithful/spiritual connection. Technology has helped in so many areas of life throughout the pandemic but there are things that cannot be substituted. Virtual masses are not cutting it. Nor is the lack of fellowship that comes from in-person worship. As a result, it can leave people feeling a little lost.

Kelsey, 31, living in Salt Lake City told us that **“community plus service was key”** for her. She used to be in a young adults group but since the pandemic that has stopped since they didn’t have the physical structure or place to meet. **“Hard for me to feel connection to religion in the way I did before, so in the past year I have had to find what this means to me now.”**

She has found it hard to connect on her own without a community to guide that connection. While she has wanted to receive guidance, there has been no physical structure to go to.

Even someone who has found the tech solutions

**“40% effective”**, Jenika recalls a car trip with her two-year-old son and his own longing for their faith community.

**“We were going down the road we usually take to get there [to our house of worship]. And he’s like, ‘Are we going?’ And he says ... ‘Oh, I miss that place.’”**

Like Kelsey and Jenika, the majority of people in our quant survey are looking forward to getting back to or getting into worship. Of those people seeking change in their life once the pandemic is over (72% of adults), 57% want to change the practice of their belief in a higher power.

Similarly, they are also looking to take more steps to further connect with their communities.

**83%** are looking forward to taking time to help others in their local community.

**80%** are looking forward to getting to know others or being part of their local community.

**85%** are prioritizing their actions in a way that sets a good example to others.

These now dormant relationships within their faith communities are not the same as a friend/family bond. These are different, very deep connections with like-minded individuals. The religious aspects of these community groups can be self-cultivated but there is no substitution for the element of community to help people find their path.



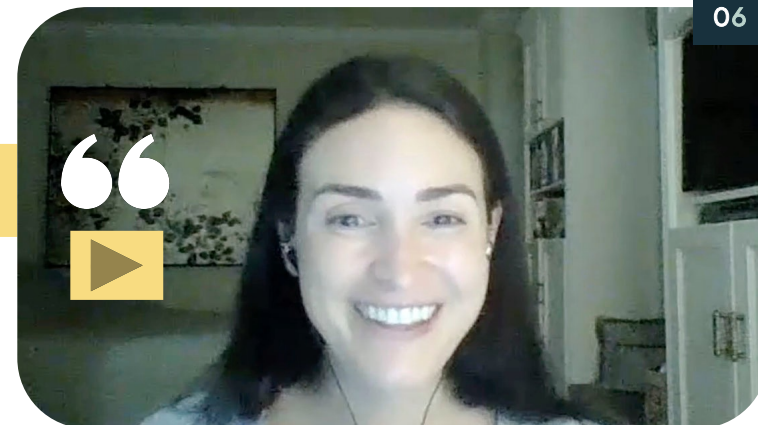
# TURNING TO NATURE TO NURTURE YOUR SPIRIT

Not everyone is spiritual in a way that is expressed through an organized religion. Even during the past year, faith and spirituality is also expressed by connecting with nature.

Jennifer, 41, New York City, has found a new appreciation for Central Park and the rejuvenation that a walk through nature can provide, even in a city park. She recently took a trip to the Caribbean and sat in the window seat on the flight home.

*“I feel like there’s a higher power. I feel like it’s nature in a way. I do feel the need, it’s nice to connect and acknowledge the beauty in the world. ... [on the flight] I was looking at the clouds and I’m like ‘This is so amazing!’ I literally was blown away. I was taking pictures, it felt like I was on my first flight.”*

Jill, a mother of 3 in Michigan, has had her faith shaken this year. *“Why are so many bad things happening at once? Who would put this much on us? But – He wouldn’t give us more than we can carry, you know? We only are given what we can carry*



Jill and her family have *“definitely more of a need to connect with nature ... like being closer to the earth. I guess it’s kind of spiritual to be out there in quiet and we’ve definitely felt more of a drive for that.”*

She continues, *“Hey, COVID can’t affect the woods. The woods are still the woods, and it feels good to be out there. You’re with nature. You’re kind of just reconnecting with yourself too, I guess,”* Jill observes. *“We’ve sought out more times to get in touch with ourselves and get in touch with nature and just like try to find the good out there. Nobody can take the woods away.”*

The connection to nature and spirituality isn’t new. Forests have long been likened to cathedrals by as diverse a group as John Muir, Mikhail Gorbachev, Theodore Roosevelt and Alice Walker.

# FINDING MEANING IN CHANGE

What does this shift in the practice of religion, spirituality, and faith mean for you and your business? Here are our top implications:

- 1/ “Community” is defined by more than neighborhood, family, or friends. Don’t forget the spiritual side and the role of organized religion in your consumer’s lives.

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- 2/ The diversity in how people are responding reflects the range of reactions we are seeing in other parts of life – from how people want to work to how they will live and play in the future. The rules are being rewritten.

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- 3/ How can your business help people engage in their community, do good and be a role model for others? Look for ways to support local organizations (whether faith-based or not, that is up to your organization). The point is, people are wanting to get involved, reconnect with their neighbors and help out.

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- 4/ How can you help the people who have discovered their own practice to continue on their journey of self-practice? What are the apps, journals and other products that can help them practice their faith at home?

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***“It’s really sad. It really is. And it makes you kinda angry at the same time and kinda bitter that, ‘Hey, there needs to be either, something has to happen and you can’t keep people from their faith as much.’”***

– Jennifer, rural SC  
41, mom of 3

For more on the pandemic and the changes that are coming, check out...

[Chapter 8:  
The End is the Beginning](#)

[Chapter 7:  
72% of Adults Seek Change Post-pandemic](#)

And the rest of the [Navigating to a Normal](#) content produced so far.

How to get involved

We are proud to offer workshops and other opportunities to help you decipher the changes that are happening and how they impact your business and the research you need to do to stay on top of these ever-changing times. Email us at [hello@ignite-360.com](mailto:hello@ignite-360.com)

Created by

Robin Algaze, Marisa Skwiat,  
Stephanie Spencer, Rob Volpe  
and Simona Zhang